

**To:** R2 RRC[R2\_RRC@epa.gov]  
**From:** Johnson, Valencia  
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**Subject:** Puerto Rico Methyl Bromide News Clips

## **EPA: Pesticide that sickened Delaware family also used improperly in Puerto Rico**

Philadelphia Inquirer

By Sandy Bauers,

April 17, 2015

The federal investigation into the improper use of a pesticide that apparently poisoned a Delaware family vacationing in the U.S. Virgin Islands has expanded west to another Caribbean island, Puerto Rico.

The Environmental Protection Agency reported Thursday that there was evidence that the pesticide, methyl bromide, had been used improperly "at various locations" in Puerto Rico. However, officials were unable to further characterize the settings - whether they were residences, resorts, or other locations.

"I can just tell you that we're looking at potential illegal applications, so it wouldn't be an agricultural use. It's instances where it should not be applied," said Judith Enck, EPA administrator for the region that includes the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

The latest discovery was made after the agency determined that the pesticide used in the Virgin Islands - in more than one instance and location, officials have discovered - came from two licensed distributors in Puerto Rico. The EPA then notified the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture, which sent inspectors to pesticide-application companies, including Terminix, identified as the company that sprayed the chemical in the condominium on the island of St. John where the Delaware family was staying.

"Once we confirmed that the methyl bromide came from two licensed distributors in Puerto Rico, the next logical question was, we know it's been used in the Virgin Islands, do we know it's been used in Puerto Rico? So we expanded our investigation," Enck said.

Local and federal officials are fanning out, inspecting pest-control companies on the island, she said. "We can talk to business owners, we can request records, we certainly can determine if they have canisters on site," she said.

"Indeed, we found evidence it was used improperly in Puerto Rico at various locations," Enck said.

Enck also said her agency was working with authorities in Puerto Rico to determine if any injuries or illnesses had been reported that would suggest exposure to methyl bromide. "We certainly are not aware of anything similar to what we've learned about in the Virgin Islands," she said.

Stephen Esmond, an administrator at the Tatnall School in Wilmington; his wife, Theresa Devine, a dentist; and their two teenage sons, who attend Tatnall, became seriously ill two days after methyl bromide was sprayed in a condominium under the one in which they were staying. On March 20, paramedics were called to the condo, where they found Esmond unconscious and the three other family members having seizures. The family initially was treated in the Virgin Islands and then airlifted closer to home.

An update on their conditions was not available Thursday evening, but a spokesman for the family reported a week ago that while Devine had been released from the hospital, the others were still hospitalized and the boys were still in comas.

The pesticide, a neurotoxin, has been banned in many countries. The United States allows certain agricultural uses, but since 1984 it has not been legal to apply it in residential settings.

Enck said that the only permissible use in Puerto Rico involved fumigating crates of commodities that come into its ports. Only two companies, which she did not name, are authorized to use it for these quarantine settings.

"So if you're not one of those two, and you've got methyl bromide on site, that's going to be a question," she said.

On Tuesday, the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture issued a legal order requiring all certified pesticide applicators to inform the department 36 hours in advance of any spraying and get department approval before continuing with the spraying.

Enck called it "a good order that will help with the situation."

The U.S. Department of Justice has begun a criminal investigation into the incident.

Virgin Islands newspapers have reported that other companies on the two other islands of the territory, St. Thomas and St. Croix, had stocks of the pesticide. The governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Kenneth Mapp, said at a news conference this month that he would not reveal the names of the additional companies that possessed or used the pesticide until a final report was issued, according to the Virgin Islands Daily News.

**Investigated fumigation company after poisoning family (Translated using Google Translate – NOT a literal translation!)**

**The incident occurred in Saint John, but the pesticide was purchased in Puerto Rico**

ELNUEVODIA.COM

By Ivelisse Rivera Quiñones

Thursday, April 16, 2015 - 6:57 PM

From the investigation it emerged that Terminix allegedly sprayed with the chemical, which was purchased in Puerto Rico, the apartment on the ground floor of the building where the family was.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) investigates, at least, to a company in Puerto Rico by the mishandling of pesticides containing methyl bromide, a chemical that can cause serious medical consequences to humans.

An investigation by the federal agency revealed that the chemical has been used incorrectly in the island. The methyl bromide is approved for agricultural use. Its use in residences or any other closed installation is forbidden, because it can damage the nervous system and respiratory system of humans.

"Documents suggest that methyl bromide has been used improperly in several places in Puerto Rico. The EPA is working closely with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry to identify potential victims," the EPA announced this afternoon in written statements.

The investigation that led to findings locally began last March when a family of Delaware was intoxicated with the substance while on holiday in the luxury resort Sirenuse in Saint John, Virgin Islands. Theresa Devine and Steve Esmond, with their teenage children aged 14 and 16 were found convulsing. The family was moved to Philadelphia where he still receives medical attention, in fact, the boys five days ago still remained in a coma.

Elias Rodriguez, agency spokesman confirmed to ELNUEVODIA.COM that one of the investigated companies is Terminix. The fumigation company, is a US company with offices in 47 states and 11 countries, including Puerto Rico.

From the investigation it emerged that Terminix allegedly sprayed with the chemical, which was purchased in Puerto Rico, the apartment on the ground floor of the building where the family was.

"The number of companies is something that is part of the investigation. Yes I can confirm that Terminix is one of the investigated" Rodriguez said.

The Department of Agriculture of Puerto Rico is working on research and on Tuesday issued an order to investigate several companies that use the chemical to verify if they are doing in compliance with federal regulations.

"The USDA and EPA are you collecting information from suppliers and companies using methyl bromide products in Puerto Rico in relation to the distribution and use of them," he said.

Rodriguez did not speak to the specific case, but said that a general test a company that failed to comply with EPA regulations may receive financial penalties.

In the case of the family of Delaware, those responsible could also face criminal charges given the seriousness of the situation. The US Justice Department is also investigating the matter.

### **What is methyl bromide?**

Methyl bromide is a colorless chemical (gas or liquid) that is used to kill pests such as insects and rats as well as fungi. At low concentrations, the substance is odorless. In large amounts, has a sweet, fruity smell.

Slight exposure to the chemical can cause:

- Headache
- Weakness, fatigue and nausea  
loss of sense of direction

Exposure to high concentration can:

- Muscle tremors and seizures
- Trouble, breathing, as it can irritate the lungs and cause fluid to accumulate.
- Damage To the kidneys and nervous system

People Who breathe a large amount of methyl bromide may die.

### **Pesticide that poisoned family on Caribbean vacation and left two sons in critical condition also found in Puerto Rico**

Daily Mail

By Kelly McLaughlin For Dailymail.com and Associated Press

April 16, 2015

- **Methyl Bromide was improperly used in U.S. Virgin Islands resort that family was staying in when they were poisoned**
- **Steve Esmond, his wife Theresa Divine and their two teenage sons fell seriously ill while staying at the Sirenusa Resort in St. John**
- **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said the toxic pesticide may have been improperly applied in locations in Puerto Rico as well**
- **EPA regional administrator Judith Enck said she is not aware of anyone sickened by the pesticide in Puerto Rico**

The toxic pesticide that poisoned a U.S. family on vacation in the Virgin Islands has also been improperly used in Puerto Rico, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Thursday after a federal investigation.

Officials said documents suggest methyl bromide may have been improperly applied in various locations in Puerto Rico.

EPA regional administrator Judith Enck said the agency and Puerto Rico's Department of Agriculture are investigating where and when the pesticide was used and how much was applied.

'The EPA is taking this very seriously,' she said in a phone interview. 'I can't tell you how widespread this is... We're very early in our investigation.'

Enck said she is not aware of anyone sickened by methyl bromide in Puerto Rico. The EPA banned the chemical for residential use in 1984, primarily for health concerns.

Nancy Feliciano, agriculture department spokeswoman, said Puerto Rico officials would comment soon.

The chemical sickened a family of four from Wilmington, Delaware, last month in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Two teenage boys went into comas after being exposed at the Sirenusa Condominium Resort in Cruz Bay, St. John.

The Esmond family was staying in the second floor of a unit whose first floor was sprayed with the pesticide to eradicate an indoor beetle that eats wood, officials have said.

Steve Esmond and his wife, Dr Theresa Devine, and their two teenage sons fell seriously ill during their stay.

They began having seizures and were airlifted to separate hospitals in Philadelphia suffering major respiratory trauma. Sean, 16, and Ryan, 14, were in critical condition.

Family attorney and spokesman James Maron did not respond to messages for comment.

He said in a statement last week that the boys remained in critical condition while their mother had been discharged and their father was recuperating.

**Pesticide that hurt 4 in Virgin Islands also in Puerto Rico**

The San Diego Union-Tribune

**By DANICA COTO Associated Press**

April 16, 2015

A federal investigation into the recent sickening with a toxic pesticide of a U.S. family vacationing in the Virgin Islands found that the chemical has also been improperly used in Puerto Rico, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Thursday.

Officials said documents suggest methyl bromide may have been improperly applied in various locations in Puerto Rico. EPA regional administrator Judith Enck said the agency and Puerto Rico's Department of Agriculture are investigating where and when the pesticide was used and how much was applied.

"The EPA is taking this very seriously," she said in a phone interview. "I can't tell you how widespread this is. ... We're very early in our investigation."

Enck said she is not aware of anyone sickened by methyl bromide in Puerto Rico. The EPA banned the chemical for residential use in 1984, primarily for health concerns.

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indoor beetle that eats wood, officials have said. The family began having seizures and was flown to hospitals in the U.S.

Family spokesman James Maron did not respond to messages for comment. He said in a statement last week that the boys remained in critical condition while their mother had been discharged and their father was recuperating.

The EPA has said a certified applicator working for Tennessee-based Terminix used the pesticide at the Virgin Islands resort. Sea Glass Vacations LLC, which rents units at Sirensa, terminated its contract with Terminix last week. Terminix has said it is conducting its own investigation and is cooperating with the EPA.

The U.S. Justice Department also is investigating.

EPA officials said Thursday the pesticide used in the Virgin Islands came from licensed distributors in Puerto Rico, where inspectors are visiting pesticide applicator companies, including Terminix.

"This has been prohibited since the 1980s," Enck said. "There should be no confusion."

Also found in:

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<http://www.aol.com/article/2015/04/16/pesticide-that-hurt-4-in-virgin-islands-also-in-puerto-rico/21173207/>

<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/pesticide-hurt-virgin-islands-puerto-rico-30376643>

<http://www.caribbeanbusiness.pr/news/pesticide-that-sickened-4-in-usvi-also-used-in-puerto-rico-108813.html>

